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13 May 1954

MEMORANDUM TO: Special Assistant, Deputy Director (Administration)

SUBJECT : Power Failure, Departmental Area

1. In response to your oral request, the following is a description of the power failure experienced on 6 May 1954, in certain Agency occupied buildings; an explanation of its causes; remedial action taken and probable incidence of reoccurrence, along with a summary of existing Agency stand-by installations designed to meet such emergencies.

2. The incident in question, which occurred on 6 May 1954 and brought about a complete electric power failure in Tempo Building "L" and a partial failure in Tempo Building "K" was caused by water leaking into Transformer #17-A located near Atomic Energy Commission occupied Tempo Building #3, resulting in a short circuit and blowing out a main PEPCO feeder (#631) which in turn put out of service Transformers #6, 7, and 8 located in the Tempo Buildings "L" and "K" area. Power failed in these buildings at 2:18 p.m. and was fully restored by 1:00 a.m., 7 May 1954 when PEPCO repairmen completed work on the main feeder (#631). An additional transformer in the Curie Hall Building area was momentarily without power but was restored to service quickly since PBS electricians were able to switch it to another PEPCO feeder. Similar action was impossible in the case of the transformers previously mentioned. The PBS Group Superintendent found, on later investigation, a joining improperly sealed and has requested in a memorandum to General Services Administration that the contractor who installed this and other transformers in this area be recalled to thoroughly inspect all these units. He has further assured this Office that such a failure is relatively rare, most especially since alternate PEPCO power sources are in the majority of cases readily available.

3. Agency stand-by units, a total of four, are described below as to location, type, and function covered.

a. South Building: A 60KW, diesel unit, manually operated at present, designed to provide emergency light and power to Room 2, Administration Building and the adjacent corridor and to the telephone equipment room and switchboard room, South Building.

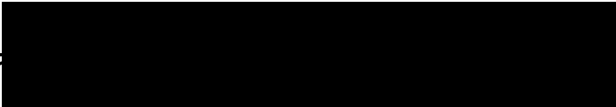
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b. Que Building: A 10KW, gasoline unit, automatically operated, designed to provide emergency light and power to the CIA Watch Office.

c. Quarters Eye: A 10KW, gasoline unit, semi-automatically operated, designed to provide emergency power and light to the FBID teletype room.

d. Tempo "L" Building: A 200KW, diesel unit, automatically operated, designed to provide emergency power and light to the Signal and Message Centers, first and second floor of the 1200 Wing, Tempo "L" Building. This unit, incidentally, operated perfectly throughout the emergency previously discussed.

4. In considering the possibility of installing stand-by units to provide emergency power to all Departmental Areas, the prohibitive costs involved as opposed to the incidence of such failures would seem to make such installations impractical. PBS electricians have assured that in the great majority of cases such failures are of very short duration and, as previously indicated, those functions which cannot be interrupted for even so short a time are provided for by existing stand-by units.

  
Chief,  
Real Estate & Construction Division

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